

Frequently Asked Questions

The Use of Latex Gloves

1. What's the Authority's position on the use of latex gloves?

The Use of Latex policy clearly states that latex gloves must not be used unless in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances must be fully justified by the wearer's manager and be authorised by the Occupational Health Department.

2. Why has this restriction on the use of latex gloves been put in place?

Allergic reactions to exposure to natural rubber latex (NRL) have increased significantly over the last ten years.

The proteins naturally present in NRL cause the allergies either through direct contact with the skin or by inhalation of powder from powdered latex gloves.

These allergies can be potentially life threatening. It is critical that the Authority manages the use of latex to make sure we don't put employees or service users at risk.

3. What are the types of allergies that can develop?

There are two types of allergy to NRL, type I allergy and type IV allergy.

Type IV allergy

This is a delayed hypersensitivity reaction which occurs 6 - 48 hours post-exposure. Symptoms include:

- Red itchy scaly rash, often localised to the area of use, i.e. wrists and forearms with glove use, but which may spread to other areas.

Type I allergy

Type I natural rubber latex allergy is an immediate allergic reaction to NRL proteins and is potentially life threatening. Deaths have occasionally been reported due to latex allergy. Symptoms include:

- Urticaria (hives) and hay fever type symptoms, asthma.
- Though rare, more severe symptoms such as anaphylaxis (a condition where there is a severe drop in blood pressure leading to possible loss of consciousness or severe breathing difficulty)

Months or even years of exposure without symptoms may precede onset of clinical symptoms of Type 1 NRL allergy.

4. Does this mean I won't be able to wear gloves for my job?

No, if a risk assessment has identified that gloves are necessary for the job you do then you must still wear gloves. Your manager will need to review the risk assessment and determine if another type of glove can be used. There are many types of glove on the market and you might be able to use vinyl, nitrile or polyisoprene gloves.

5. What happens if I have to use latex gloves?

In some exceptional cases the review of the risk assessment will identify that only latex gloves can be used for the activity. In these cases the manager will have to write a justification for why latex has to be used and this must be based on a risk assessment. This justification cannot be based on personal preference of the wearer, it must relate to the fact that use of any other glove will put the wearer at increased risk than if they were using latex gloves.

This justification must then be sent to Occupational Health who will confirm / reject the justification from the manager. If Occupational Health reject then latex gloves must not be used.

If Occupational Health approve the justification then a strict set of controls are put in place to protect the wearer.

6. I have been identified as requiring latex (NRL) gloves, what happens now?

If your manager can justify your use of latex gloves and Occupational Health support this then you will be issued with low protein, powder free latex gloves. These gloves will be for your use only and must not be passed to anyone else. A COSHH assessment will be required (see your Directorate Health and Safety Officer) and you will require health surveillance by the Occupational Health Department. This surveillance might take the form of a paper questionnaire or a visit to the Occupational Health Department. You will also be shown how to check for signs of latex allergy developing.

7. What about the existing stock of latex gloves I have?

Once the policy is implemented there should be no uncontrolled stock of NRL gloves. Issue of the gloves should be carried out through Procurement or through your directorate arrangements and should only be issued to individuals who have been identified as requiring them. If you have stocks of latex gloves, make sure they are disposed of.

8. Where can I get further information?

- Contact your Directorate Health and Safety Officer.
- Caerphilly County Borough Council Latex Policy.
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (Amendment) Regulations 2004.
- Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1999.
- Latex and You INDG 320 ISBN 07176 1 777 7.
- Contact H.S.E. Information Line Tel: 08701 545 500.
- Contact H.S.E. via Internet at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/>

Last updated on 18th April 2005